

Activating Prior Knowledge/Schema

~Talking Drawings~

Objectives: To activate schema
To provide information that shapes future teaching
To provide a vehicle for students to measure learning
To make connections $T \rightarrow S$, $T \rightarrow T$, $T \rightarrow W$ (for extension)

Materials: Book that will be used to introduce subject matter
(Any text can be used, alter lesson to your needs)
Talking Drawings sheet (if you choose) or anything to draw on
Writing implements
Concrete item to activate schema (especially for younger students)
Making connections posters (for extension)
Chart paper/overhead transparency (for extension)
Timer (helps to keep students on track)

Process: Introduce the book/area of study using the concrete item (ex: toy insects for an insect unit, etc.) or by telling the title of the story. Show the cover of the book if you want to help give a clue. (I normally do not show the book because I do not want them to draw the picture on the cover.)

Invite students to quickly draw a picture that shows everything they know about this subject. Take about 5 to 10 minutes for drawing time. Once the time is up, have them turn to their neighbor and discuss their drawings—what they know about the subject. Take about 5 minutes for each pair. Use timer to help, set it for two and a half minutes so it goes off and then let the next person talk for the remaining two and a half minutes.

Be sure that the drawings reflect an activation of schema/prior knowledge about the subject matter. If not, try to engage that student in conversation that helps them activate their prior knowledge/schema.

If not using for unit of study:

Read the story and discuss it as you normally would. Make comparisons to their drawings and see if they learned anything new about the subject matter. This is where a lesson just to work on activating schema would end.

Extension: At this point, you can record the various ideas under K of a KWL chart and move into the wonder questions as you make predictions about the story/subject. While recording on the KWL chart students can write one or two word labels on their drawings as reminders. (Be sure everyone is with you as you move on to predicting—only write during the recording of the K.)

Read the story to the students and use the drawings to help make connections with the text. You can have “connection people” that hold the posters and/or write down the connections that are made during and after reading the text. The “connection people” can record their specific type of connection. (Connections should be done as you go along in your study and only after you have practiced with each type of connection.)

Management: This lesson can be carried out over several days or throughout a unit.

First Day:

- Activate Schema using Talking Drawings technique
- Start KWL: Use Drawings for K, and make predictions for W
- Collect drawings

Day Two: (This can be done for every text used for every text in unit)

- Review KWL chart (OWL can be used instead of KWL)
- Read story
- Make connections (record under L if using OWL)
- Use W list of KWL to help generate what was learned for L.
- Record “what was learned” under the L of the KWL chart.

Day Three: (You can do this as you see fit, mostly for OWL)

- Read the connections one by one
- Decide if response helped with the text. Mark it with a 1.
- Decide if the response did not help. Mark it with a 2.
- If child who made response disagrees, have them explain their thinking.
- Stop here with L if using OWL—these are your links.

Last Day: (Culmination of Unit)

- Compare W to L of KWL and see if all was answered, etc.
- Draw a picture representing what they know about the subject now
- Use pre and post drawings as a comparison—authentic assessment

Talking Drawing Source: *Talking Drawings: A Strategy for Assisting Learners* by Suzanne McConnell, Journal of Reading, December 1992/January 1993.

